

The Art of Making Mistakes in Baseball and Music

Thomas McGregor -- Music Matters

You arrive at 161 Street in the Bronx, New York and you're met by the towering and majestic Yankee Stadium. The ground you stand on represents stories that have been written about in history books, featured in the New York Times and, holds a special place in the hearts of people around the world. This historic stadium was propelled into the stratosphere of infamy in the mid-1990's when George Steinbrenner led the New York baseball team the New York Yankees to an amazing comeback, with six World Series entries between 1996 and 2003. Steinbrenner, who came from Ohio to New York, learned that failure and setbacks can teach you exactly what you need to know to succeed.

I haven't always done a good job, and I haven't always been successful - but I know that I have tried.
-George Steinbrenner

How You Win When You Fail

Before Steinbrenner made a name for himself when he acquired ownership of the New York Yankees, he owned a small basketball team called the Cleveland Pipers in 1960. By 1962, as a direct result of Steinbrenner's direction, the franchise went bankrupt. With the Pipers, Steinbrenner learned valuable lessons in leadership, budgeting and how to effectively communicate a vision to people in a large organization. Mistakes became an essential benefit for him as he took over leadership of the Yankees. What he learned was that setbacks and mistakes show you exactly what you shouldn't do, that you didn't know before. Therefore, making mistakes and embracing losses is beneficial for quick growth and ultimately, success.

Final Thoughts and Action Steps

Don't believe what you hear. Being a failure isn't a constant state -- it's a momentary opportunity to learn what not to do, what you didn't know. Making a musical mistake should be an invigorating experience. Mistakes shows you a new way of thinking about what you're working on.

1. Failing is important so you know what not to do, that you didn't know before.
2. Failure isn't a concrete state, but a momentary opportunity.
3. Make mistakes immediately and early.
4. Mistakes allow you to have future benefits that you aren't aware of yet.

Leveraging The Power of Questions

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The music lesson was in full swing after the student and I exchanged pleasantries. The student seemed attentive, following along in their music with me as I played slowly so that they could follow along. Every so often, as I normally do, I would pause to ask questions to make sure that the learning of deeper aspects had attention. I would ask: "What note did we just stop on?" The student adjusted their eye placement on the page to find the note I was referring to. This showed me the power of a simple question and, how students can leverage this power of questioning to get the most out of their lessons, workshops and continuing education classes.

Observation of Your Environment

Observations are powerful components to deeper learning. Keeping your mind aware and open to new things in your class will enable you to ask questions that are deeper than the usual surface-level inquiries.

Power Questions

Brandon Cline of the Chicago Center for Teaching describes **power questions** in the following way:

"While asking questions may seem a simple task, it is perhaps the most powerful tool we have as people. If we ask the right question at the right moment we may inspire new heights of vision and insight into the knowledge we are learning. A good question can excite, disturb, or comfort, and eventually yield an unexpected bounty of understanding and critical awareness. But even apart from such serendipitous moments, question-asking serves many functions that make it the stock in trade of the skillful teacher and student."

As a student, have confidence. Questions, no matter your perception, are always great questions. Questions, by their nature, open the mind to new ways of thinking and analyzing information.

Final Thoughts and Action Steps

1. **The best questions come from a relaxed mind.**
2. **Use both; specific and creative questions.**
3. **Write down questions when you think of them to ask your teacher later.**
4. **Have confidence that all questions are welcome and always important.**
5. **Ask questions often.**
6. **Use the power of questions to challenge your teachers and mentors.**